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OPPOSITION, PERSECUTION, AND PERSEVERANCE

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John Wesley challenged listeners throughout England (and Scotland, Ireland, and Wales) to a deeper level of commitment and a serious pursuit of a holy life. Wesley said that many who thought they were Christians seemed to be so in name only; they were almost Christians. They did not have the joy, assurance, or peace that comes from being wholly surrendered to God. They lived their lives in compromise with sin, willing to do just enough good but no more. They entertained evil, provided that it wasn't too extreme. They did little or nothing to grow in love with God.

In what ways did faith in the church of Wesley's day resemble the faith in our churches today? Some would suggest in a great many ways.

Wesley said there is so much more to being a Christian than simple acceptance; there is a power,

love, and joy that come from walking with God. And God expects more of Christians than simply trying to not be so bad as other people.

John Wesley's preaching was unnerving to many of the priests and laity who heard him. These listeners were unsettled by his zeal and passion and were challenged by his sometimes condemning and convicting words.

Because his style and message offended so many churches, they were closed to him. So he began preaching in the fields and marketplaces, often quite near the churches that had shut their doors to him. Most towns with a market had a market cross at the center as a visible reminder to merchants that Christ watched as they conducted business. Wesley often preached on the stairs or near these crosses. He would start by singing hymns until a crowd had gathered, then he would begin to preach about the need for salvation, forgiveness, and waking to God.

The priests and laity offended by his sermons often were the same people who hired thugs and rabble-rousers to disturb him. Many of the priests felt Wesley was preaching without authorization and meddling with the people in their town.

During nineteen years of sermons, John was pelted with rotten tomatoes, manure, and stones, but he refused to give up.

In every crowd, though, were those who heard Wesley and were moved. He described the work of the Holy Spirit among the mobs and his often miraculous deliverance from harm. He reported that frequently those who came like lions to devour him left like lambs, and many found their own souls awakened by the Spirit through his preaching.

For nineteen years this was Wesley's weekly, even daily experience. He was dragged before magistrates, beaten with fists, pummeled with rocks. Homes where he stayed were set afire. How discouraging it must have been. But he refused to give up, and his perseverance in the face of opposition made all the difference.

John Wesley was harassed, harangued, and lampooned by thousands. Surely he felt like quitting, but he refused. What if he had stopped in 1738 when church after church closed their doors to him, or if he had given up after the Oxford sermon in 1744 on Scriptural Christianity, when the faculty and students of his alma mater harshly criticized him? Wesley's perseverance made

possible the great revival led by Methodists around the world.

I recall a particularly difficult time in my own ministry, more than ten years ago, when I felt like giving up. I'd preached a sermon that led several hundred people to leave our church. I'd received notes and e-mails expressing disappointment in me. I remember telling my wife one evening, "LaVon, I don't want to do this anymore. It's too hard." She wisely asked, "Is God calling you to quit, or are you simply giving up?" She told me she would be by my side whatever I did, but her words stuck with me. I had not felt God calling me to quit; I was just discouraged and wanted to give up. So I continued to press forward, asking God to give me strength and to lead me as I sought to lead the church. It was several months before the feelings of discouragement lifted. In the years since, I've experienced so many blessings and exciting moments of ministry through our church, all of which I would have missed had I quit when things were difficult.

There will be times in your life when people oppose you for doing the right thing and you feel like quitting. At those times, here's the question: Is God calling you to quit, or are you simply giving up? If God is not calling you to quit, will you give up or keep going? Will you, like Wesley, brush off the manure and go at it again? The people who change the world are those who refuse to give in, who get back up when they're pushed down, who have the courage, with God's help, to keep moving forward.

By 1757, nearly twenty years after returning from America, Wesley had preached thousands of sermons and the mobs had largely ceased. In rare instances he would be harassed while speaking, but generally others in the crowd would silence the hecklers. Literally millions had found their souls awakened by Wesley's field preaching. By his sixties, Wesley had become something of a celebrity and was invited to preach in nearly every pulpit throughout England! By his seventies and eighties he was a national hero, having been used by God to touch countless lives.

The great revival of Christianity took place under Wesley's leadership because he refused to give up, despite years of sometimes violent opposition. He remembered the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad."

Today's post is an excerpt from [Revival](#).